

Management program falls short

Here's a new management program that attempts to combine a number of project- and people-tracking functions into one package.

It's called Who-What-When, and it's offered by Chronos Time Management Software of San Francisco, (415) 626-4244, for \$189.95. Although it uses a novel approach that's fairly well-implemented, I found it to be less than ideal.

The program is appropriately named. Here's a rundown of the three main features it offers:

■ The "Who" section provides the user with a phone list and a cross reference file that shows the links between people and projects. There's also a card file that can be used to take notes.

■ The "What" feature is a project management system. It gives you a device for keeping track of milestones and coordinating people and tasks on one or several projects.

■ The "When" portion gives you daily calendars and to-do lists. It can be programmed to set off an

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Hillel Segal

alarm that warns you of upcoming events, but it works only if you keep the program on your screen.

But the program has some big disadvantages, too.

Even though it apparently was designed with the executive in mind — with a handsome three-ring binder that emulates other executive-style time management systems — I found Who-What-When to be too complex and too time-consuming for everyday use. It seems tailored more to an executive assistant responsible for keeping track of tasks and people.

Also, the program isn't memory resident, like many of its competitors. You have to first exit your application program and then load Who-What-When in order to use it. Then, before you can return to an

other program, you have to exit Who-What-When and reload the other one. Once out of Who-What-When, you've deactivated all your alarms, making that feature useless.

Finally, it bothered me that the auto-dial feature in the "Who" portion doesn't accept special codes or billing numbers when it dials through a modem, as its competitors do.

The "What" portion, on the other hand, is impressive and has features that go far beyond other time management systems.

But the key question here is: How much time are you willing to spend inputting all the necessary information about each project into a computer and then making all the daily changes necessary to keep it up-to-date?

Also, the role of the accompanying notebook for "What" muddles the package's usefulness. It seems that you should keep the information in the computer or in the notebook — that keeping it in two places involves duplication and

wastes time.

While the "What" feature struck me as novel at first, I think that the upkeep necessary to use it would soon become burdensome.

The "When" portion is only adequate. There are several other memory-resident calendar programs, such as Prodex from Prodex Development Co. of Seattle, (206) 527-2898, that are memory-resident and much easier to use.

The bottom line: Although Who-What-When might be the first program to combine information about people, projects and time management, it seems to be more flash than substance. It might be useful for an executive assistant who's trying to keep track of an office full of executives, their time and their projects. But for an executive, it's too complicated.

Hillel Segal's column evaluates programs, gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.